

Including People with Hearing Loss in Emergency Preparedness, Response & Recovery Efforts



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Agenda

- 1) What is CEPIN?
- 2) Lessons Learned: 9/11 – Hurricane Katrina
- 3) Communicating with People who are Deaf, Deaf-Blind & Hard of Hearing
- 4) Emergency Alerts
- 5) Emergency Kits
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*What is **CEPIN**?*

The *Community Emergency Preparedness Information Network (CEPIN)* Project
CEPIN provides model community education programs in emergency preparedness for deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing consumers, public policy makers, first responders & volunteers.

NVRC is one of four regional **CEPIN** centers.



Lessons Learned

9/11, Hurricane Katrina, and other Emergency Events

DHHCAN Report

- **Current emergency communication systems for deaf and hard of hearing persons were given a failing grade.**
- **Emergency communication is the top priority because we must know:**
 - **When there is an emergency**
 - **How to protect ourselves**
 - **How to access resources during recovery**

Lessons Learned

Emergency Information: Hurricane "Katrina"

- Visual information was not provided on local TV
- Realtime captioning of all news programs is essential
- Captions blocked other text or were blocked by other text
- Cable subscribers had access to much more information
- New Orleans couple needed sign language interpretation
- Sign language interpreter was cut off the screen

Lessons Learned

Access in Shelters

“The most underserved group were those who are deaf or hard of hearing.”

- Less than 30% of shelters had access to ASL interpreters
- 80% did not have TTY's
- 60% did not have TVs with captioning capability
- 44% did not have areas where oral announcements were posted

“This meant that the deaf or hard of hearing had no access to the vital flow of information.”

*Report on Special Needs Assessment for Katrina Evacuees Project,
National Organization on Disability, 10/05/05*



Lessons Learned

Access in Shelters

- People with hearing loss were not identified
- Important announcements were made over public address systems
- Service animals were often denied access to shelters
- Deaf & hard of hearing people were often lost in the system, not getting the information they needed
- Some remain lost: on 11/07/05, a deaf man from Mississippi asked NVRC for help

Lessons Learned

Volunteers

- Mental Health Counselors from Gallaudet who had Red Cross training faced numerous hurdles attempting to provide services in the impacted areas
- Volunteers with expertise in hearing loss were rebuffed at shelters
- Deaf ministries, deaf schools and businesses specializing in serving people who are deaf or hard of hearing were invaluable but were not seen as part of the official recovery operation

Lessons Learned

Donations of Equipment & Services

- Volunteers setting up videophones had difficulties gaining entrance to shelters
- Foundations wishing to donate hearing aids could not cut through the red tape
- Agencies donating hearing aid batteries found they had to set up their own donation websites and distribution channels
- Audiologists had to “finagle” their way into shelters to provide such services as repair and replacement of hearing aids

People with Hearing Loss

One in ten Americans, 28-31 million, has a hearing loss

Baby boomers may push that figure to 78 million in 25 years (*Newsweek*, June 6, 2005)

Under normal circumstances, people who are deaf, deaf-blind or hard of hearing each require their own set of accommodations (sign language interpreters, tactile interpreters, assistive listening devices). In an emergency, nothing is normal....



People with Hearing Loss in Shelters

Everyone entering a shelter should be able to get all the information they need.

Identify the communication needs, not the disability.

Ask everyone:

- Can you hear the public address system?
- Can you hear on the telephone?
- If we provide a video on flu shots, do you need it to be open captioned?
- Do you need a sign language interpreter? (*if one is available*)
- Can you read & write in English?

Emergency Communication Tips

People who are Deaf & Use Sign Language

Use of qualified interpreters is recommended if at all possible. If not possible:

- Speak slowly and clearly
- Do not yell or exaggerate your speech
- Use gestures
- Allow available light to illuminate your face, but avoid backlighting
- Use written communication, including pen and paper, but understand it may be the least effective way to communicate

Emergency Communication Tips

People who are hard of hearing or oral deaf

Use of assistive listening devices often facilitates communication, if available. If not:

- Look for quiet surroundings
- Speak slowly and clearly
- Do not yell or exaggerate your speech
- Allow available light to illuminate your face and avoid backlighting
- Use written communication, including pen & paper

Emergency Communication Tips

People who are Deaf-Blind or who have a Vision & Hearing Loss

- *Use of a tactile interpreter for people who are Deaf-Blind who use sign language is highly recommended, if available.*
- *People who have a vision and hearing loss may do best with large print text, if available.*
 - Ensure that the person is oriented in the surroundings and has physical contact with someone to stay oriented.
 - Signal the need to evacuate by tracing a large "X" on his or her back, then lead that person to safety.
 - Use large block letters to communicate - on paper or trace letters on his or her palm.
 - Ask what works best for communication.

Emergency Communication Tips

Accommodations in an Emergency

- Interpreters (*including CODA, friends, family*)
- Assistive Listening Devices (*e.g., Pocketalkers*)
- Bulletin Boards (*electronic boards, white boards, black boards, cork boards*)
- Computers, TTY's, PDAs
- Pre-prepared instruction & information forms
- Pen & Paper

Emergency Alerts

What ***Won't*** Work

- AM/FM or Satellite Radio
- Sirens
- Bullhorns, megaphones, PA systems

What ***May*** Work

- Television
- Text Alerts
- NOAA Weather Radio
- "Reverse 9-1-1"



Emergency Alerts

Television

- Visual access to emergency information is required by FCC regulations

http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro/captioning_regs.html#79.2

- Three actions were taken against TV stations in 2005: California wildfires, DC area tornadoes, Florida hurricanes



Emergency Alerts

Television

- Public Information Officers in Arizona send the following text with emergency announcements:
"In compliance with FCC requirement 47 C.F.R. 79.2, it is recommended that all television stations run captions or visual displays during an emergency broadcast. If possible, please provide real-time captioning of the broadcast, or at the very minimum, please include all essential information on road closings, shelters, advice to prevent injury and other critical information that is provided orally. Please ensure that this captioning does not interfere with crawling announcements."



Emergency Alerts

Television – *Drawbacks*

- **Captions Can be Unreadable**
Need accurate captioning that is clear and visible
- **Captions Can Be Unavailable**
Migration of TV, phone, Internet to wireless hand-held devices and Internet sites. Need caption capability of all devices w/screens of any size
- **When the Power is Out**
Portable battery operated TVs are generally not captioned.
The only one known: Toshiba MD9DP1 (*9" DVD combination*)
- **When the person with hearing loss doesn't know about captioning**

Emergency Alerts

Emergency Text Alerts

- Provides the entire community immediate alerts to email, text enabled cell phones, pager, PDA, etc., in the car, at work or home
- **Variety of local text alerts**
 - Governments, e.g., DC, Virginia's Arlington & Fairfax counties
 - Local TV stations
 - Emergency E-mail Network, www.emergencyemail.org
 - The Weather Channel (*has a monthly fee*)
www.theweatherchannel.com
- **Maine & North Carolina are distributing pagers or weather radios to deaf & hard of hearing residents**



Emergency Alerts

Emergency Text Alerts – *Drawbacks*

- Wireless coverage is not uniformly available
- Wireless devices w/text are not always interoperable
- Devices, cost of monthly service not affordable for many
- Lack of portable pagers/PDAs with screens and keys readable for deafblind
- Text message information is often brief; the assumption is that the consumer will go to the radio, Internet or TV or make a phone call for more information

Emergency Alerts

NOAA Weather Radio

- Provides consumers with a warning during events when seconds count
- Some manufacturers provide a jack for external visual and/or tactile alerting
- Some provide a jack for audio headsets that works with neckloops

Emergency Alerts

NOAA Radio – *Drawbacks*

- Short text message is not equivalent to audible message
- Weather Radio Improvement Program (WRIP) needs funding to provide full text of information – best case scenario 3 years to implementation
- Current equipment will not be able to receive full text when it does become available
- Doesn't give school closings, local emergency events, traffic info
- Some models make you chose between audible and voice alert

http://www.nws.noaa.gov/nwr/special_need.htm



Emergency Alerts

Reverse 9-1-1

- Can provide for multiple options, i.e., phones, email alerts, etc., that are accessible to people with hearing loss
- Can provide a sign up option for unlisted and TTY phone numbers

Emergency Alerts

Reverse 9-1-1 - Drawbacks

- If the system is not TTY compatible – or if the provider requires the community to pay more for the TTY option – it may never reach people who use TTY's. That could be a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act and/or local law.
- Unless the message is repeated 2-3 times, hard of hearing residents may not understand it.
- Electronic voice messages may not be understood by hearing residents.
- Automated menu options on the message will also be difficult for hard of hearing residents to understand.
- Reaching this community by phone will be difficult because many people who are deaf & hard of hearing are migrating away from landline phones.

Emergency Kits

Public information offices often promote Emergency Kits that include a radio as the 2nd or 3rd most important item after food, water and/or first aid.

Consumers will be resistant to using kits, and resistant to agencies promoting the kits, unless they show some understanding of their hearing loss.

Emergency Kits

Emergency Kit for People with Hearing Loss

- Portable TTY, volume controlled phone amplifier and batteries
- Extra hearing aids, batteries, extra CI processor, CI batteries
- Portable captioned TV (*Toshiba MD9DPI*)
- Sidekick, PDA, Text Cell phone, batteries and chargers and/or adapter to car chargers
- Extra eye glasses

Last on the list:

- Portable radios & batteries (*and that would be for use by friends, family, neighbors*)

Partnering for a Safer Community

Your #1 Resource:

Virginia Department of Deaf & Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)
Outreach Contractors www.vddhh.org

(See VDDHH handout for the Contractor in your region)

VDDHH Outreach Contractors will help you:

- **Identify community leaders**
- **Ensure inclusion of leaders who represent the range of hearing loss (*signing deaf, oral deaf, cued speech users, late-deafened, hard of hearing, Cochlear Implant users, hearing aid users, etc.*)**
- **Provide training**



Partnering for a Safer Community

Include people with hearing loss in Emergency Planning:

- **Public policy**
- **Emergency drills**
- **Shelter planning**
- **Recovery planning**
- **CERT training**
- **Citizen Corps Councils**

Resources

Deaf & Hard of Hearing focus:

NVRC www.nvrc.org

CEPIN www.cepintdi.org

General Disability focus:

NOD www.nod.org

Disability Preparedness Resource Center

www.dhs.gov/disabilitypreparedness/resourcecenter

Access Board www.access-board.gov

